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AUTHOR Rothman, Max B.
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ABSTRACT

The Southeast Florida Center on Aging administers a comprehensive program in gerontology at Florida International University, with core and contract funding from a variety of federal, state, and institutional sources. The center's aims are to serve as a focal point for applied public policy research; design and implement gerontological education and training programs for students, professionals, and older learners; and provide professional and technical assistance to government and community agencies and organizations serving older persons. To achieve these, it engages in a wide variety of research, educational, and community service activities, with emphasis on state and local policy and practice issues. (MSE)

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PART A

COVER PAGE

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
PROJECT CONTACT: MAX B. ROTHMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

ABSTRACT

The Southeast Florida Center on Aging administers a comprehensive program in gerontology at Florida International University. It receives its core funding of $350,000 directly through the University's budget as a component of the State University System. Originally, the Center was funded by contract pursuant to a $300,000 legislative appropriation to the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services. In addition, the Center on Aging seeks external funding from the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services and other agencies within the state aging network as well as from the federal government, private foundations and corporations.

The Center on Aging pursues activities designed to fulfill its overall mission of serving as a focal point for applied public policy research, a designer and implementer of comprehensive gerontological education and training programs for students, professionals and older learners, and a source of professional and technical assistance for government and community agencies and organizations serving older persons. The Center develops specific goals and objectives to implement this broad mission. To achieve them, the Center engages in a wide variety of educational activities that further the pursuit of knowledge and understanding about aging in today's society, with special emphasis upon state and local policy and practice issues.

In effect, then, the Center's mission encompasses the traditional academic emphasis upon research, education and training and community service. Given the strong public sector emphasis, research focuses upon applied policy and practice involving services to older people, education focuses upon support of both undergraduate and graduate level instruction as well as professional training for those who plan and deliver services to older people, and community assistance to area agencies on aging and to providers of housing, health and social services to older people. The following narrative includes a summary of the Center's activities in each of these areas.

INTRODUCTION

The Center on Aging is a comprehensive program that includes research, education and training and community service. During its five years of existence, the Center has sought to mobilize faculty from many disciplines throughout the University, as well as community experts, to participate in these various activities. The Center seeks to secure external funding wherever possible in order to expand its capability to accomplish these objectives. This report will include a review of specific projects conducted by the Center and a more complete description of the nature and scope of the Center's activities. It will include highlights from each of the major areas of activity as well as a review of specific funding sources that have helped to support these activities. In addition to a review of the origins of the Center on Aging, the narrative will include highlights of the Center's most important activities during this time as well as an assessment of results and projections for the future.

BACKGROUND

The Southeast Florida Center on Aging was identified both by University planners and state human services administrators as an academic unit that could help bridge the gap between academia and human services professionals engaged in providing services to older people in Southeast Florida. At that time, there was little interrelationship between the University and the professional community in the field of aging. No research had been conducted concerning state or local policy and practice in the field, professionals received little or no training in their fields and no one at the University had been providing technical assistance to agencies and organizations engaged in planning and delivering services. Furthermore, given the large numbers of older people residing in the area surrounding the North Miami Campus of Florida International University, including at the time at least 110,000 people 60 and over within a five mile radius of the campus, and the large numbers of organizations and professionals providing services in South Florida, there was an identified need to which both the University and the State Legislature could respond. The Center was initially funded in July, 1984, by contract pursuant to a line item legislative appropriation to the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services to meet these needs.

Center staff immediately began to develop a needs assessment to ascertain specific areas for education and training, research and technical assistance. The agenda developed during the first and second years of the Center's existence has continued to expand in response to increasingly identified needs of state and local policy makers and professionals in the field of aging. Within the context of its public sector focus, the Center has attempted to pursue its original goals and objectives by continuing to seek additional funding for specific projects. Each of these projects has enabled the Center to heighten its response to the original needs identified at the time the Center was established.

DESCRIPTION

The Center on Aging administers a comprehensive program in gerontology. Its activities are designed to fulfill an overall mission of serving as a focal point for applied public policy research, a designer and implementer of comprehensive gerontological education and training programs for students, professionals and older learners, and a source of professional and technical assistance for government and community agencies and organizations serving older persons. To achieve its goals and objectives, the Center engages in a wide variety of educational activities that further the pursuit of knowledge and understanding about aging in today's society, with emphasis upon state and local policy and practice issues.

The following will provide a summary of highlights in each of the major areas of the Center's activity:

1. RESEARCH: The Center has conducted a number of research studies, evaluations, needs assessments, and sourcebooks. Many of these have been contracted for by the Aging and Adult Services Office of the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, the major planning, funding, and service delivery agency for older people in Florida. Others have been funded by various organizations within the aging network. The Center's studies have included the following:

a. Meeting the Challenge: Organizational and Policy Imperatives for Long Term Care in Florida (1987). This report was the Center's largest and most important project and addressed major organizational and policy issues outstanding at the time in Florida. In large part, as a result of this study, Florida instituted a new "Better Living for Seniors" initiative to restructure the state's approach to planning and delivering services to older people.

b. The Linkage of Government Support for Housing and Long Term Care Services in Florida (1989). This report addresses the need for linkage of housing and long term care services for low and moderate income, frail elderly and the need for greater experimentation with the linkage of housing and services at an intermediate level of care.

c. Assessments of the State's Community Service Systems in Dade and Leon counties (1986-1988). These 4 reports analyze the effectiveness of newly designed systems at the community level to improve the coordination of planning and delivery of social and health services to frail elderly.

d. Needs Assessments of Older People in Dade County and, more specifically, in the Little Havana and Opa Locka areas of Dade County (1986-1988). These telephone needs assessments of older people helped to establish data essential for more effective planning and allocation of resources by state and local agencies providing services to older people.

e. A Social Services Land Use Plan at the Site of South Florida State Hospital (1989). Conducted with the FAU/FIU Joint Center for Environmental and Urban Problems, this project established a planning framework for the future use of the

state's major institution for the mentally ill in South Florida and focused primarily upon opportunities for additional programmatic development at the site.

f. Sourcebooks on the Demographics of Aging, Housing, Alzheimer's Disease, Volunteerism, and the new concept of Service Credits. Each of these sourcebooks has collected available information on a particular subject and summarized and presented it for use by policy makers and practitioners.

In each case, these studies have been provided to the state aging agency, area agencies on aging, other aging organizations and professionals in the field.

2. EDUCATION AND TRAINING: The Center has developed and supported certificate programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels of the University, helping to organize and develop courses and interested faculty to provide instruction in the multidisciplinary areas involved in the study of aging. Furthermore, the Center developed an extensive Professional Certificate in Eldercare program designed to provide continuing education opportunities to professionals who serve older people in Southeast Florida. This certificate program has been serving over 1,000 people per year and includes social workers, nurses, psychologists, operators of various levels of housing for older people and paraprofessionals. Conferences, seminars and special lecture series complement these efforts. The Center administers the Elders Institute, an award-winning continuing education program for older learners that provides a wide array of academic and personal enrichment courses and special programs throughout the year.

3. COMMUNITY SERVICE: Center staff have been engaged in a wide variety of projects designed to assist the State of Florida, area agencies on aging, and various local community organizations and agencies engaged in providing services or support to older people. This has included the development of innovative projects such as the Service Credit Project (pursuant to funding from a number of foundations) that encourages volunteers to provide services to older people in return for future credit or rights to receive service, intergenerational programming within the Dade County Public School system, technical assistance in the establishment of a new area agency on aging in Dade County, service on numerous boards of agencies and organizations and periodic consultation with other organizations and individuals engaged in the aging network in South Florida.

The Center on Aging staffing consists of an Executive Director, Associate Director in charge of education and training, a Director of the Elders Institute, a Research Director, two administrative assistants and various additional administrative support. Research assistants are hired typically on a project-by-project basis to provide support on individual projects. The Center's core funding increased from $300,000 to $350,000 during 1988-89 but also includes additional grants and contracts substantially increasing the Center's budget in any given year. Support might range from a corporate sponsorship of $3,000 to support the Intergenerational Law Advocacy Project in the school system to $150,000 to complete a major long term care study for the State of Florida.

RESULTS

The program of the Southeast Florida Center on Aging is a continuing one and does not generate specific findings except, where appropriate, on a specific project by project basis. In general, the Center has responded to a wide variety of needs for the type of research, education and service provided by staff of the Center. For example, in the area of research, numerous projects have been funded, studies have been widely distributed and reports are requested by organizations and professionals throughout the state; Center staff are often requested to report on projects at state and national conferences. There are also numerous requests for training sessions or discussions on research projects locally. With respect to education and training, the numbers of people requesting training sessions and participating in these activities has continued to increase annually. Attendance at training sessions, conferences and seminars exceeds 1000 annually and shows no sign of lessening in the years ahead. Recently, the Center has reached out to provide training to new classes of students including managers of housing projects not traditionally associated with the social services network. Finally, requests for technical assistance continue on a regular basis and the limited staff prioritize on a continuing basis in order to maximize the most effective use of available time and resources.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although there is no formal evaluation of the program, every indication is that it continues to serve well-identified needs and has been effective in responding to them. The State of Florida and other funding sources continue to provide external support, often soliciting projects on their own initiatives. In essence, the development of effective relationships with policy makers and professionals at various levels continues to ensure a steady stream of requests for new projects by the Center on Aging. The Center's own planning process continues as part of the University's overall processes and continues to focus upon and refine the goals and objectives outlined above. The Center will continue to attempt to develop increased numbers of faculty involved in issues of aging and to further the interrelationships among research projects and educational activities. The Center's internal planning process helps to ensure that the original focus is maintained while allowing opportunities to take advantage of new developments in the field.

The program has been budgeted sufficiently to achieve its objectives but has been increased through the efforts of Center staff to obtain external funding that expands the range of appropriate activities. Efforts will continue to expand available resources consistent with the Center's objectives while ensuring a balance with current obligations. As far as other colleges or universities are concerned, centers on aging exist in many of them. They are organized and funded in many different ways for a wide variety of purposes and activities. The specific public sector focus of the Southeast Florida Center on Aging is unique in Florida and could be replicated as long as a sufficient base or core funding is established. This provides stability and continuity at a certain level while providing opportunity for periodic expansion.